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VIII.—THE BEGINNINGS OF POETRY

I

Certain [Indian] societies require that each member have a special song; this song is generally of the man's own composition, although sometimes these songs are inherited from a father or a near relative who when living had been a member of the society. These individual songs are distinct from songs used in the ceremonies and regarded as the property of the society, although the members are entitled to sing them on certain occasions. When this society holds its formal meetings a part of the closing exercises consists of the simultaneous singing by all the members present of their individual songs. The result is most distressing to a listener, but there are no listeners unless by chance an outsider is present, for each singer is absorbed in voicing his own special song which is strictly his own personal affair, so that he pays no attention to his neighbour, consequently the pandemonium to which he contributes does not exist for him.

The foregoing paragraph from Miss Alice C. Fletcher's account of Indian music¹ reads like a travesty of the accepted view of primitive song, its character and authorship. There is the familiar primitive "horde," engaged in festal singing, without onlookers. Yet instead of collaborative composition, improvisation, and communal ownership of the ensuing "ballad," we have individual authorship and ownership, and individual singing. This is the testimony of a specialist who has spent many years among the people of whom she writes, studying and recording their songs and their modes of composition. Easily recognizable is the homogeneous primitive group, singing in festal ceremony; but this group does not conduct itself

¹ *The Study of Indian Music*. Reprinted from the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. I, p. 233. 1915.

Compare a custom among the Karok, an Indian tribe of California (Stephen Powers, *Contributions to North American Ethnology*, vol. III, p. 29, Washington, 1877).

in the way which literary historians have insisted that we should expect.

The songs of primitive peoples have received much attention in recent years, especially the songs of the American Indians. An immense amount of material has been collected and made available; and this has been done in a scientific way, with the help of countless phonographic and other records. Instead of having to rely on the stray testimonies of travellers, explorers, historians, and essayists, the student of primitive poetry has now at his disposal an amount of data unavailable to his predecessors. He need not linger among the fascinating mysteries of romantic hypotheses, but can supply himself with the carefully observed facts of scientific record.²

² References of chief importance for the American Indians are Frederick R. Burton, *American Primitive Music*, with especial attention to the songs of the Ojibways, New York, 1909; Natalie Curtis, *The Indian's Book*, New York, 1900; and the following thorough studies: Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, in *Bulletins* 45 (1910) and 53 (1913) of the *Bureau of American Ethnology*; Alice C. Fletcher, *A Study of Omaha Indian Music*, *Papers of the Peabody Museum*, vol. VII, No. 5, 1893, *Indian Story and Song*, Boston, 1900, *The Hako: a Pawnee Ceremony*, 22 Report (1904), *Bureau of American Ethnology*, and *The Study of Indian Music* quoted *supra*; James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 14 Report, *Bureau of Ethnology*, Part II, 1896. Excellent pieces of work are "Hopi Songs" and "Zuñi Melodies," by B. I. Gilman, published respectively in the *Journal of American Ethnology and Archæology*, vol. I, 1891 and vol. V, 1908, but nothing is said in these regarding the composition or presentation of the songs recorded.

Here also may be cited F. Boas, *The Central Eskimo*, *Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1884-1885, *Songs and Dances of the Kwakiutl*, etc., *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1888, *Eskimo Tales and Songs*, *ibid.*, 1894; F. J. de Augusta, *Zehn Araukaner Lieder*, *Anthropos*, VI, 1911. Many references are cited later, especially books, studies, or special articles dealing with South American, African, and Australian tribes.

In this matter it cannot be valid to object that we should not look among North or South American Indians, or Eskimos for "beginnings." It cannot reasonably be said that these tribes are too advanced, too highly civilized, to afford trustworthy evidence as to aboriginal modes. As a matter of fact, we can go little farther back, in the analysis of culture, than these peoples, if we are to stay by what can be demonstrated. When we have learned what we can learn from the primitive tribes on our own continent, in South America, Africa, Australia, Oceania, we know pretty much all that we can surely know. If we go to the prehistoric, we are conjecturing, and we ought to label our statements "conjecture." In general, gradations of "primitiveness" among savage peoples are difficult to make. A social group may show the simplest or least organized social structure, and yet be relatively advanced in musical and artistic talent. Another group may show advance in social organization, yet be backward in song and story. And certainly even the most advanced of the Indian communities (with the exception of civilized Mexico and Peru) are every whit as primitive as the mediæval peasant communes, from whose supposed ways we are constantly asked to learn as regards poetic beginnings.³ If, as we are told, prehistoric song-modes are reflected in the folk-dances and festal throngs of mediæval peasants and villagers, or in the singing of nineteenth-century Corsican field laborers, Styrian threshers, Gascon vintage choruses, Italian country-folk, Silesian peasants, Faroe Island fishermen, and harvest-field songs everywhere,⁴ they ought to be reflected yet more in the song-modes of the American Indians.

³ See F. B. Gummere, *The Beginnings of Poetry*, 1901, and *The Popular Ballad*, 1907.

⁴ *Ibid.*

II

"COMMUNAL" AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

At the present time the accepted or orthodox view, *i. e.*, among literary critics, hardly among anthropologists, concerning the authorship of primitive song and the "beginnings of poetry" is reflected in such passages as the following, from a recent work by Professor Richard Green Moulton:⁵

The primary element of literary form is the ballad dance. This is the union of verse with musical accompaniment and dancing; the dancing being, not exactly what the words suggest to modern ears, but the imitative and suggestive action of which an orator's gestures are the nearest survival. Literature, where it first appears spontaneously, takes this form: a theme or story is at once versified, accompanied with music, and suggested in action. When the Israelites triumphed at the Red Sea, Miriam "took a timbrel in her hands; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances." This was a ballad dance; it was a more elaborate example of the same when David, at the inauguration of Jerusalem, "danced before the Lord with all his might." And writers who deal with literary origins offer abundant illustrations of folk-dances among the most diverse peoples in an early stage of civilization.

In this passage and in his diagrams showing literary evolution⁶ Professor Moulton gives the "ballad dance" the initial position in the chronology of musical and literary history, characterizing it as the "primitive literary form"—the ballad dance, moreover, according to the usual view, of the *throng*. Individual composition of and proprietorship in song is of secondary development; and when this stage has been reached, "folk-song" has passed into "artistry."

Better, let some passages from Professor Gummere's

⁵ *The Modern Study of Literature*, Chicago, 1915. From Chapter I, "The Elements of Literary Form."

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 26.

The Beginnings of Poetry be cited. Professor Gummere is our leading scholar of the subject, and in view of his learning, his immense bibliographical equipment, and his years of attention to the matter, his words may well have especial weight. Here are some characteristic sentences: "Poetry begins with the impersonal, with communal emotion."⁷ "The ballad is a song made in the dance, and so by the dance. . . The communal dance is the real source of the song."⁸ "The earliest 'muse' was the rhythm of the throng."⁹ "Festal throngs, not a poet's solitude, are the birthplace of poetry."¹⁰ "Overwhelming evidence shows all primitive poetical expression of emotion to have been collective."¹¹ Let two quotations of greater length be given:

As the savage laureate slips from the singing, dancing crowd, which turns audience for the nonce, and gives his short improvisation, only to yield to the refrain of the chorus, so the actual habit of individual composition and performance has sprung from the choral composition and performance. The improvisations and the recitative are short deviations from the main road, beginnings of artistry, which will one day become journeys of the solitary singer over pathless hills of song, those "wanderings of thought" which Sophocles has noted; and the curve of evolution in the artist's course can show how rapidly and how far this progress has been made. But the relation must not be reversed; and if any fact seems established for primitive life, it is the precedence of choral song and dance. . . .

Here it is enough to show that rhythmical verse came directly from choral song, and that neither the choral song, nor any regular song, could have come from the recitative.¹²

It is natural for one person to speak, or even to sing, and for ninety-nine persons to listen. It is also natural for a hundred per-

⁷ *The Beginnings of Poetry* (1901), p. 139. Later, by Professor Gummere, are *The Popular Ballad* (1907), and the chapter on Ballads in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* (1908); but these deal primarily with the English and Scottish ballads, not with the origins of poetry.

⁸ P. 321.

¹⁰ P. 212.

¹² P. 93.

⁹ P. 106.

¹¹ P. 13.

sons, under strong emotion, to shout, sing, dance, in concert and as a throng, not as a matter of active and passive, of give and take, but in common consent of expression. The second situation . . . must have preceded.¹³

To come farther down in the history of song, a favorite picture with Professor Gummere is of European peasant folk in the Middle Ages, improvising "ballads" in song and dance, and thus—by virtue of the simple homogeneous character of their life—establishing a type of balladry superior to, and having more vitality than, anything of the kind having its origin in individual authorship. It is

¹³ Pp. 80, 81. In Professor Gummere's article on "The Ballad and Communal Poetry," Child Memorial volume (*Harvard Studies and Notes*, etc., 1896), he says: "Spontaneous composition in a dancing multitude—all singing, all dancing, and all able on occasion to improvise—is a fact of primitive poetry about which we may be as certain as such questions allow us to be certain. Behind individuals stands the human horde. . . . An insistent echo of this throng . . . greets us from the ballads." He adds communal poetry to Wundt's (*Ueber Ziele und Wege der Völkerpsychologie*) three products of the communal mind,—speech, myth, and custom. "Universality of the poetic gift among inferior races, spontaneity or improvisation under communal conditions, the history of refrain and chorus, the *early relation of narrative songs to the dance*" [the italics are mine] are facts so well established that "it is no absurdity to insist on the origin of poetry under communal and not under artistic conditions." More difficulty lies in "the assertion of *simultaneous composition*. Yet this difficulty is more apparent than real."

Grosse, *Anfänge der Kunst* (1894), ch. ix, finds the poetry of primitive peoples to be egoistic in inspiration, and gives examples of lyrics of various types which point to this. "Im Allgemeinen trägt die Lyrik der Jägervölker einen durchaus egoistischen Charakter. Der Dichter besingt seine persönlichen Leiden und Freuden; das Schicksal seiner Mitmenschen entlockt ihm nur selten einen Ton." For Professor Gummere's discussion and rejection of Grosse's view, see *The Beginnings of Poetry*, pp. 381 ff.

For a present-day German view of primitive poetry, see Erich Schmidt, "Die Anfänge der Literatur," *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, Leipzig, 1906, I, pp. 1-27. For a French view, see A. van Gennep, *La Formation des Légendes*, Paris, 1910, pp. 210-211.

a long gap, that between aboriginal song and dance and the English and Scottish ballads of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; yet it is a gap we are asked to bridge. Undoubtedly, if that "most ancient of creative processes," the communal throng chorally creating its song from the festal dance, existed among the mediæval peasants and produced work of the high value of the English and Scottish ballads, the same "ancient method" should prevail among that yet more primitive people, the American Indians.

That it is an absurd chronology which assumes that individuals have choral utterance before they are lyrically articulate as individuals, seems—extraordinarily enough—to have troubled very few. Did primitive man sing, dance, and compose in a throng, while he was yet unable to do so as an individual? We are asked to believe this. Are we to assume that he was inarticulate and without creative gift till suddenly he participated in some festal celebration and these gifts became his? Professor Gummere cites as evidence, so important as to deserve italics, Dr. Paul Ehrenreich's statement concerning the Botocudos of South America, "*They never sing without dancing, never dance without singing, and have but one word to express both song and dance.*"¹⁴ Much the same thing, save as regards limitations of vocabulary, might have been said by a traveller among the ancient Greeks, with whom dance was generally inseparable from music and verse. Nothing is proved by this characteristic of the Botocudos, if it is a characteristic; any more than anything is proved by the fact that the far more aboriginal Akkas of South Africa¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ueber die Botocuden, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xix, pp. 30 ff. Quoted in *The Beginnings of Poetry*, p. 95. See note 40 *infra*.

¹⁵ Some references for the Akkas are G. Burrows, *On the Natives of the Upper Welle District of the Belgian Congo, Journal of the*

have songless dances, or by the fact that danceless songs—a circumstance hard to fit into the accepted view of primitive poetry—have been reported among the Andamanese, the Australians, the Maori of New Zealand, Semang of Malaysia, Seri of Mexico, and Eskimo of the Arctic, as well as among practically all North American tribes that have been studied in detail.¹⁶ Surely the individual does everything he can do, or chooses to do, as an individual, before, or contemporary with, his ability to do the same as a member of a throng. The testimonies of travellers as to communal singing and dancing

Anthropological Institute (1889), xxviii; Sir H. James, *Geographical Journal*, xvii, p. 40, 1906; G. A. Schweinfurth, *Heart of Africa*, N. Y., 1874, vol. II; H. von Wissmann, *Meine Zweite Durchquerung Aequatorial-Afrikas*, Frankfort, 1890; H. M. Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, N. Y., 1891; H. Schlichter, *Pygmy Tribes of Africa*, *Scot. Geog. Mag.*, viii, etc.

¹⁶ According to the testimony of Miss Fletcher, in a letter to the present writer, there are many songs sung by Indian societies in which there is no dancing. Such songs are spoken of as "Rest Songs." In the account quoted at the opening of this paper, of the simultaneous singing of individual songs by the members of a certain society as the closing act of a meeting, the members are sitting as they sing. Their individual songs are, in a sense, credentials of membership. Each song is strictly individual, and refers to a personal experience.

"In most societies," says Miss Fletcher, "as well as in the ceremonies of the tribe, the songs are led by a choir, or by persons officially appointed as leaders. The members of the society frequently join in the song. I do not recall anyone performing a dramatic dance and singing at the same time. While all dances are accompanied by song, many songs are sung without dancing.

"Some of the dancing is not violent in action, the movement is merely rhythm and swaying. In such dances, the dancers sing as they move. Occasionally, as I recall, the song for a dance which is dramatic and vigorous, bringing all the body into play, will be sung by the choir (men and women seated about the drum). Some of the people sitting and watching the dance may clap their hands in rhythm with the drum. This, however, is playfulness by some privileged person and indicates enjoyment."

among savage or peasant communities prove nothing at all as to origins; certainly they do not prove that collective poetic feeling and authorship preceded individual feeling and authorship. Testimonies as to tribal song ought to outnumber testimonies as to individual song, since the spectator is chiefly interested in tribal ways. He would be struck by and record tribal ceremonies, rituals, and songs, where individual doings would escape attention or seem unimportant. Besides, choruses would no doubt be more numerous than solos, and bound up with more important occasions; much as solo dances are infrequent, among savage tribes, compared to mass dancing. To reiterate, however, testimony no matter how great its quantity, that savage peoples sing and dance in throngs, or improvise while doing so, proves nothing as to the priority of communal over individual feeling, authorship, and ownership.

The evidence concerning primitive song which should have greatest weight is not that of travellers and explorers, interested chiefly in other things than song, but that of special scholars, who have recorded and studied available material with a view to its nature, its composition, and its vitality. Among these there seems to be neither doubt nor divergence of opinion; and their testimony is at variance with the now established tradition of the literary historian.

I wish to make clear in advance that I have no desire to deny the general social inspiration of song. In a broad sense, all art is a social phenomenon—the romanticists to the contrary. Song is mainly a social thing at the present time, and it was yet more prevailingly social among our remote ancestors. I wish rather to examine the following specific hypotheses: the inseparableness of primitive dance, music, and song; the simultaneous mass-composition of primitive song; mass-ownership of primitive song; the

narrative character of primitive song; the non-existence of the primitive artist. I also have strong doubts concerning the birth of rhythmic or musical utterance from rhythmic action, if this be conceived as a form of limb or bodily motion.

In the following citations of illustrative material, I have drawn primarily upon American Indian material. It is this material, on the whole, which has been collected and studied most carefully. Coming as it does from homogeneous primitive peoples, in the tribal state, having one standard of life, and as yet unaffected by the poetic modes of civilization, it should have importance for the questions under discussion. Parallel material available from South America, Africa, Australia, and Oceania, yields, however, the same evidence.

III

INDIVIDUAL AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

That American Indian song is of individual composition, not the product of group improvisation, much evidence may be brought to support. It will be seen also, from the illustrative material cited, that the Indian has a feeling of private ownership in his song. It would be reasonable, therefore, to assume that, as far back as we can go in primitive society, there should be a sense of individual skill in song-making, as of individual skill in running, hurling a dart, leaping, or any other human activities. There is something absurd in singling out musical utterance as the one form of expression having only social origin or social existence.

A large number of Indian songs are said to have come into the mind of the Indian when he was in a dream or a trance (surely not a "communal" form of experience!).

Many of the Chippewa songs, for example, are classified as "dream songs." Says Miss Densmore: ¹⁷

Many Indian songs are intended to exert a strong mental influence, and dream songs are supposed to have this power in greater degree than any others. The supernatural is very real to the Indian. He puts himself in communication with it by fasting or by physical suffering. While his body is thus subordinated to his mind a song occurs to him. In after years he believes that by singing this song he can recall the condition under which it came to him—a condition of direct communication with the supernatural.¹⁸

It is said that in the old days all the important songs were "composed in dreams," and it is readily understood that the man who sought a dream desired power superior to that he possessed. A song usually came to a man in his "dream"; he sang this song in the time of danger or necessity in the belief that by so doing he made more potent the supernatural aid vouchsafed to him in the dream. Songs composed, or received, in this manner were used on the warpath, in the practice of medicine, and in any serious undertaking of life.¹⁹

¹⁷ Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, I, II. Bulletin 45 (1910) and 53 (1913), *Bureau of American Ethnology*. For examples see I, pp. 118 ff., II, pp. 37 ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, p. 118.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 16. Compare also: "There is no limit to the number of these [ghost-dance songs] as every trance at every dance produces a new one, the trance subject after regaining consciousness embodying his experience in the spirit world in the form of a song, which is sung at the next dance and succeeding performance until superseded by other songs originating in the same way. Thus a single dance may easily result in twenty or thirty new songs" (James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion*, 14 Report, *Bureau of Ethnology*, Part II, 1896, p. 952). Many trance songs from many tribes are given pp. 953-1101.

For testimony from Australia, see A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904. He says, p. 416, "In the tribes with which I have acquaintance, I find it to be a common belief that the songs, using that word in its widest meaning, as including all kinds of aboriginal poetry, are obtained by the bards from the spirits of the deceased, usually of their kindred, during sleep, in dreams. . . The Birraark professed to receive his poetic inspiration from the Mrarts, as well as the accompanying dances, which he was supposed to have seen first in ghost-land. . . . In the

There is also testimony as to private ownership.²⁰

The Chippewa have no songs which are the exclusive property of families or clans. Any young man may learn his father's songs, for example, by giving him the customary gift of tobacco, but he does not inherit the right to sing such songs, nor does his father force him to learn them.²¹

We learn further that the healer combines music and medicine. "If a cure of the sick is desired, he frequently mixes and rolls a medicine after singing the song which will make it effective."²² And that "The songs of a Chippewa doctor cannot be bought or sold."²³

So far as the two men who heard me were concerned, the argument was convincing, but there lingered even with them a reluctance to help me with certain songs because they belonged to other persons. Nearly all the Indians of my acquaintance recognize this proprietary interest in songs. A has no right to sing B's songs; B did not compose them, but they came down to him through his family, or from some chief who fought him, and B alone should say whether they might be given another.²⁴

Miss Fletcher writes of the Omaha:

It would be a mistake to fancy that songs floated indiscriminately about among the Indians, and could be picked up here and there by any chance observer. Every song had originally its owner. It be-

Narrang-ga tribe there are old men who profess to learn songs and dances from departed spirits. These men are called Gurildras. . . . In the Yuin tribe some men received their songs in dreams, others when waking." Specimen songs follow.

²⁰An interesting seventeenth-century testimony is the following from LeJeune's *Relation*, 1636: "Let us begin with the feasts of the Savages. They have one for war. At this they sing and dance in turn, according to age; if the younger ones begin, the old men pity them for exposing themselves to the ridicule of the others. Each has his own song, that another dare not sing lest he give offense. For this very reason they sometimes strike up a tune that belongs to their enemies to aggravate them."—*Jesuit Relations* (Thwaites ed.), vol. ix, p. 111.

²¹ *Chippewa Music*, I, p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*, I, p. 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁴ Burton, *American Primitive Music*, p. 118.

longed either to a society, secular or religious, to a certain clan or political organization, to a particular rite or ceremony, or to some individual. . . . The right to sing a song which belonged to an individual could be purchased, the person buying the song being taught it by the owner.

These beliefs and customs among the Indians have made it possible to preserve their songs without change from one generation to another. Many curious and interesting proofs of accuracy of transmission have come to my knowledge during the past twenty years, while studying these primitive melodies. . . . Close and continued observation has revealed that the Indian, when he sings, is not concerned with the making of a musical presentation to his audience. He is simply pouring out his feelings, regardless of artistic effects. To him music is subjective: it is the vehicle of communication between him and the object of his desire.²⁵

Now a few testimonies as to individual authorship. A first instance is from the songs of the Omaha. For the complete story of this song, the reader is referred to the account of Miss Fletcher:

At length the Leader stood up and said, "We have made peace, we have come in good faith, we will go forward, and Wa-kon'-da shall decide the issue." Then he struck up this song and led the way; and as the men and women followed, they caught the tune, and all sang it as they came near the Sioux village.²⁶

²⁵ Alice C. Fletcher, *The Indian in Story and Song*, pp. 115-117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. The following passage from *A Study of Omaha Indian Music*, p. 25, by Alice C. Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche, also throws light on the composition of certain Indian songs:

Like the Poo-g'-thun, the Hae-thu-ska preserved the history of its members in its songs; when a brave deed was performed, the society decided whether it should be celebrated and without this dictate no man would dare permit a song to be composed in his honor. When a favorable decision was given, the task of composing the song devolved upon some man with musical talent. It has happened that the name of a man long dead has given place in a popular song to that of a modern warrior; this could only be done by the consent of the society, which was seldom given, as the Omahas were averse to letting the memory of a brave man die. . . . the songs were transmitted from one generation to another with care, as was also the story of the deeds the song commemorated.

Two instances from the Pawnee illustrate perfectly the poet musing in solitude on the meaning of nature,—like a sort of Pawnee Wordsworth!

The “Song of the Bird’s Nest” commemorates the story of a man who came upon a bird’s nest in the grass:

He paused to look at the little nest tucked away so snug and warm, and noted that it held six eggs and that a peeping sound came from some of them. While he watched, one moved and soon a tiny bill pushed through the shell uttering a shrill cry. At once the parent birds answered and he looked up to see where they were. They were not far off; they were flying about in search of food, chirping the while to each other and now and then calling to the little ones in the nest. . . . After many days he desired to see the nest again. So he went to the place where he had found it and there it was as safe as when he had left it. But a change had taken place. It was now full to overflowing with little birds, who were stretching their wings, balancing on their little legs and making ready to fly, while the parents with encouraging calls were coaxing the fledglings to venture forth. “Ah!” said the man, “if my people would only learn of the birds, and like them, care for their young and provide for their future, homes would be full and happy, and our tribe strong and prosperous.”

When this man became a priest, he told the story of the bird’s nest and sang its song; and so it has come down to us as from the days of our fathers.²⁷

The “Song of the Wren” was made by a priest who noted that the wren, the smallest and least powerful of the birds, excelled them all in the fervor of its song. “Here,” he thought, “is a teaching for my people. Everyone can be happy; even the most insignificant can have his song of thanks.”

So he [the priest] made the story of the wren and sang it; and

²⁷ *The Hako, A Pawnee Ceremony*, in 22nd Report, Bureau of American Ethnology, Part II, p. 170. See also *The Indian in Story and Song*, p. 32.

it has been handed down from that day,—a day so long ago no man can remember the time.²⁸

Instances testifying to individual not communal composition of song among the Chippewa are no less easily cited.

The following explanation of a certain song was given by an Indian:

The song belonged to a certain man who sang it in the dances which were held before going to war. When this man was a boy he had a dream and in his dream he heard the trees singing as though they were alive: they sang that they were afraid of nothing except being blown down by the wind. When the boy awoke he made up this song, in which he repeats what he heard the trees say. The true meaning of the words is that there is no more chance of his being defeated on the warpath than there is that a tree will be blown down by the wind.²⁹

The singer stated that he composed this song himself when he was a child. The circumstances were as follows: His mother had gone to a neighbor's, leaving him alone in the wigwam. He became very much afraid of the owl, which is the particular terror of all small Indians, and sang this song. It was just after sugar making and the wigwams were placed together beside the lake. The people in the other wigwams heard his little song. The melody was entirely new and it attracted them so that they learned it as he sang. The men

²⁸ *The Hako*, pp. 171-172. See also *The Indian in Story and Song*, p. 56.

See A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, London, 1904, for instances of individual artistry among the Australians. "The makers of Australian songs, or of the combined songs and dances, are the poets, or bards, of the tribe, and are held in great esteem. Their names are known in the neighboring tribes, and their songs are carried from tribe to tribe, until the very meaning of the words is lost, as well as the original source of the song. It is hard to say how far and how long such a song may travel in the course of time over the Australian continent," p. 414. See also Kur-buru's song, composed and sung by a bard called Kur-buru, p. 420, etc. Howitt refers to one man who composed (see Umbara's songs, pp. 416, 423) when tossing about on the waves in a boat—not a very "communal" method of composition.

²⁹ *Chippewa Music*, I, p. 126, No. 112: "Song of the Trees."

took it up and used it in their moccasin games. For many years it was used in this way, but he was always given the credit of its composition.³⁰

The rhythm of this song is peculiarly energizing, and when once established would undoubtedly have a beneficial physical effect. The surprising feature of this case, however, is that the song is said to have been composed and the rhythm created by the sick man himself.³¹

It is interesting to note that many Indian songs are composed by women. The following are instances:

. . . They [the women] would gather in groups at the lodge of the Leader of the war party, and in the hearing of his family would sing a We'-ton song, which should carry straight to the far-away warriors and help them to win the battle . . . The We'-ton song here given was composed by a Dakota woman.³²

It is said that the following [Chippewa] song was composed and sung on the field of battle by a woman named Omiskwa'wegijigo'kwe ("woman of the red sky"), the wife of the leader, who went with him into the fight singing, dancing, and urging him on. At last she saw him kill a Sioux. Full of the fire of battle, she longed to play a man's part and scalp the slain. Custom forbade that Chippewa women use the scalping knife, although they carried the scalps in the victory dance.

Song
at that time
if I had been a man
truly
a man
I would have seized.³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135, No. 121: "I am afraid of the Owl."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95, No. 79: "Healing Song." Compare also Franz Boas on *The Central Eskimo*, Report *Bureau of Ethnology*, 1884-1885, p. 649: "Besides these old songs and tales there are a great number of new ones, and, indeed, almost every man has his own tune and his own song. A few of these become great favorites among the Eskimo and are sung like our popular songs."

³² Fletcher, *Indian Story and Song*, Weton Song, pp. 81, 85.

So also in the Omaha tribe: "We'tonwaan is an old and untranslatable word used to designate a class of songs composed by women

Odjib'we [a Chippewa] stated that his wife's brother was killed by the Sioux and that he organized a war party in return. The purpose of the expedition was to attack a certain Sioux village located on an island in Sauk river, but before reaching the village, the Chippewa met a war party of Sioux, which they pursued, killing one man. There were nine Chippewa in Odjib'we's party; not one was killed. They returned home at once and Odjib'we presented the Sioux scalp to his wife Dekum ("across") who held it aloft in the victory dance as she sung the following song.

Odjib'we
our brother
brings back.³⁴

Much further evidence of the composition of songs by Indian women might be cited.³⁵

The preceding are specimen testimonies. They might be added to indefinitely, and from other than Indian sources. In accounts of African, Australian, or South American tribes, one comes invariably upon the instance of the individual who makes a song—very often in soli-

and sung exclusively by them."—Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 27th Report, *Bureau of American Ethnology*, p. 421; cf. pp. 320-323 for other types of women's songs.

³³ *Chippewa Music*, II, p. 111, No. 31: "If I Had Been a Man."

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121, No. 39: Song of De-kum. Several other songs composed by De-kum are given.

³⁵ Compare Franz Boas, *Chinook Lays*, p. 224, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1888: "The greater part of those I have collected were composed by women." He adds that for a great number of tunes the "text is only a meaningless burden." For songs of the Kiowa composed by a woman, see J. W. Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 14 Report, *Bureau of Ethnology*, Part II, 1896, pp. 1083, 1085, etc. See also an article of interest by Alexander F. Chamberlain, *Primitive Woman as Poet*, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. XVI (1903), pp. 207 ff.

R. H. Codrington writes of the Melanesians (*The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, Oxford, 1891, p. 334): "A poet or poetess more or less distinguished is probably found in every considerable village throughout the islands; when some remarkable event occurs, the launching of a canoe, a visit of strangers, or a feast, song-makers are engaged to celebrate it and rewarded," etc.

tude—and the song is recognised as his. The great mass of primitive songs sung in communal or other gatherings are either portions of religious rituals, didactic, or, still oftener, magical in nature. Far from being improvised³⁶ for the occasion, they are sedulously repeated *verbatim*, the least deviation from the rote form being the occasion, not infrequently, of an entire recommencement of the ceremony.

Songs composed and sung by individuals and songs sung by groups of singers (or "throngs," if you prefer) are to be found in the most primitive of living tribes. That in the earliest stage there was group utterance only, arising from the folk-dance, is fanciful hypothesis. That primitive song is of group composition or collaboration, not individual composition, is quite as fanciful. Again, as far

³⁶ Compare the testimony of Ramon Pane, concerning the Haytians, in Ferdinand Columbus's *Life of Christopher Columbus*, ch. 14: "They have all the superstitions reduced into old songs, and are directed by them, as the Moors by the Alcoran. When they sing these, they play on an instrument made of wood. . . . To that music they sing those songs they have got by heart. The chief men play on it, who learn it from their infancy, and so sing it according to their custom."

Substantially the same account is given by Peter Martyr d'Anghre-ra (*De Orbe Novo*, English trans. by MacNutt, New York, 1912, vol. 1, p. 172): "When the Spanish asked whoever had infected them with this mass of ridiculous beliefs, the natives replied that they received them from their ancestors, and that they had been preserved from time immemorial in poems which only the sons of chiefs were allowed to learn. These poems are learned by heart, for they have no writing, and on feast days the sons of chiefs sing them to the people in the form of sacred chants."

For the North American Indians, see, for example, Washington Matthews, *Navaho Legends, Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, 1897. An account of Navaho traditional songs is given pp. 23-27. See also note 273, p. 254, *Navaho Music*, by Prof. J. C. Fillmore. Miss Fletcher gives similar testimony concerning Indian traditional lays.

back as we can go in the genesis of song-craft, there are impromptu songs, the spontaneous utterance of present emotion, and there are traditional songs, survivals or revivals of the songs of the past.³⁷ Among primitive peoples there is no such indissoluble connection between singing and dancing as the italicized observations of Dr. Ehrenreich are supposed to imply. Neither dancing nor song is invariably "choric" in savage any more than in civilized society. Solo dancing, for example, has been reported among the Semang of Perak, the Kwai, and the Andamanese, as well as among the American Indians and numerous other peoples. As for solo singing, the citations given speak for themselves.³⁸ Even when the singing is choral, it is by no means always dance-song, nor accompanied by dancing. The Kaffirs are said to be fond of singing lustily together, but, if we may trust the observation, "a Kaffir differs from an European vocalist in this point, namely, that he always, if possible, *sits down* when he sings."³⁹ Surely these recumbent Kaffirs deserve italics quite as much as Dr. Ehrenreich's Botocudos.⁴⁰

³⁷ Improvisation exists among the Obongo, Australian, Fijian, Andamanese, Zulu, Botocudo, and Eskimo tribes, as well as among the North American Indians. Traditional songs persist among the Kwai, Australian, Andamanese, Rock Vedda, Semang, Fijian, Fuegian, and Eskimo tribes, as well as among the North American Indians.

³⁸ See also citations in note 42.

³⁹ J. E. Wood, *Uncivilized Races of the World* (Amer. ed., Hartford, 1870), p. 208.

⁴⁰ We really know very little concerning the songs of the Botocudos. Dr. Ehrenreich's section dealing with them is very short, and he is chiefly interested in other things than song. These are the specimens he cites:—*Gesang beim Tanz*. Chor: "Weib jung, stehlen nichts." Ein Weib singt: "Ich, ich will nicht (stehlen)." "Der Häuptling hat keine Furcht"—*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, vol. xix, pp. 33, 61.

Testimony concerning the songs of other Brazilian tribes may be found in J. B. Steere's *Narrative of a Visit to the Indian Tribes of*

The conception of individual song can be shown to exist among the very lowest peoples. Professor Gummere's belief is that human beings get together for rhythmic movement, begin to sing, and thus song is born. But the same savage tribes that sing in groups tell stories in which individual songs appear. Among the myths of the wilder tribes of Eastern Brazil, for example, (illustrated in *O Selvagem*, the well-known collection of José V. Couto de Magalhães), there are many in which the composition and singing of songs by individuals form important incidents. This fact shows plainly that the authors of these myths were perfectly familiar with the conception of individual composition. Granting the manifestations of primitive singing and dancing throngs which seem so decisive to Professor Gummere, they are capable of quite other interpretations than those which he puts upon them.

the Purus River, Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1901, pp. 363-393. The following are songs of the Hypurinás (cannibals), and are individualistic in character: "The leaf that calls my lover when tied in my girdle" (Indian girl's song); "I have my arrows ready and wish to kill you"; "Now no one can say I am not a warrior. I return victorious from the battle"; "I go to die, my enemy shall eat me."

The following are some songs of the Paumari, a "humble cowardly people who live in deadly fear of the Hypurinás": "My mother when I was little carried me with a strap on her back. But now I am a man I don't need my mother any more"; "The Toucan eats fruit in the edge of my garden, and after he eats he sings"; "The jaguar fought with me, and I am weary, I am weary." The following they call the song of the turtle: "I wander, always wander, and when I get where I want to go I shall not stop, but still go on."

Hunting songs of the Bakairí, of the Xingu river region, egoistic in character, are cited by Dr. Max Schmidt, *Indianerstudien in Zentralbrasilien*, Berlin, 1905, pp. 421-424.

The "I" of these songs of South American tribes cannot always be "racial." The context shows that, sometimes, at least, it must be egoistic, as in the individualistic songs of the North American Indians.

IV

THE "BALLAD" AS THE EARLIEST POETIC FORM

And now what truth is in the assumption that the ballad-dance is the germ from which emerged the three separate arts, poetry, music, dance? A passage by Professor Moulton, affirming this, has been cited, and this passage presents, without doubt, a view now widely accepted in the United States.

Let us ask, first, in what sense the word "ballad" is used by those who derive poetry from it. Does Professor Moulton, for example, use the word ballad in its etymological sense of "dance song," leaving undetermined the character of the words, whether meaningless vocables, purely lyrical, or prevailingly narrative? Usually the classification "ballad" is employed of lyric verses having a narrative element. By "ballad" we are supposed to mean a narrative song, a story in verse, a short narrative told lyrically. It is a loose usage which permits scholars to use the word in the sense both of dance song and of lyrical narrative, in the same work; the ambiguity is unnecessary.⁴¹ If ballad means something like dance song, or choral dance, or folk-dance accompanied by improvisation and refrain, the term ballad-dance is tautological; for all ballads involve dancing. One wishes for more precision. But this need not detain us here.

In whichever sense the term ballad be used, it is somewhat rash to place the ballad dance so certainly at the source of man's musical and poetical expression. We have

⁴¹ In which sense, for example, does Professor G. P. Krapp (*The Rise of English Literary Prose*, 1915, Preface) use "ballad" when he writes, "Poetry of primitive origins, for example the ballad, often attains a finality of form which art cannot better, but not so with prose?"

just seen that there is individual composition and singing, song unaccompanied by dancing, and dance unaccompanied by song, as far down in the cultural scale as we can go. Certainly if ballad means, as usually it does, song-story, the ballad was *not* the earliest form of poetry; and primitive people *never* danced to ballads. The earliest songs we can get track of are purely lyrical, not narrative. The melody is the important thing; the words, few in number and sometimes meaningless, are relatively negligible. Moreover, these songs are on many themes, or have many impulses beside festal dances. There are healers' songs, conjurers' songs, hunting songs, game-songs, love songs, hymns, laments, victory songs, and lyrics of personal feeling and appeal. The lullaby is as old a lyric form as we are likely to find. Who cares to affirm that lullabies were unknown to our aboriginal ancestors? Yet the lullaby has nothing to do with the singing and dancing throng! Nor has that other very early species, the medicine man or healer's solos; nor have gambling or game songs,⁴² or love songs. Primitive labor songs are social,

⁴² See Stewart Culin, *Games of the North American Indian*, 24 Report, *Bureau of Ethnology*, 1907, for an account of singing in the Moccasin or Hidden-Ball game, pp. 335 ff. Solo singing among the Chippewa is mentioned, p. 341, among the Menominee, p. 343, the Miami, p. 344, the Seneca, p. 350, the Wyandot, p. 351, etc. See also Edward Sapir, *Song Recitative in Paiute Mythology*, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1910, p. 455, vol. XXIII: "Generally Indian music is of greatest significance when combined with the dance in ritualistic or ceremonial performances. Nevertheless the importance of music in non-ceremonial acts—for instance in the hand-game played by all the tribes west of the Rockies—should not be minimized."

There are solo-singing Bantu, Zulu, Fuegian, etc., witch-doctors and medicine men, as well as solo-singing North American Indian medicine men and gamesters. See also, for some instances of solo singing, H. A. Junod, *Les Chantes et les Contes des Ba-Ronga*, pp. 39, 44, etc., Lausanne, 1897; also G. Landtman, *The Poetry of the*

but they do not involve dancing, and they are not ballads. The class that is nearest the real ballad, in that it is based on happenings, or on the composer's experiences, is not by any means the largest or the most important group for primitive song. Songs of this latter type may be suggested by some event, or may present some situation; but they tell no story in the sense of real telling. That demands length, elaboration, completeness, beyond primitive powers. If we try to fix chronology, it is most plausible to begin with rhythmic action and with melody. Professor Gummere thinks that melody is born of rhythmic action. But vocal action of the singing type, i. e., melody, may well be as instinctive in man as in birds. Action and melody in singing may well have come together; for song interprets primarily feeling, emotion, not motion. In any case, words came later than melody, and real narrative later yet. As a lyrical species, the narrative song is a late, not an early, poetical development. If we look at what certain evidence we have, primitive songs are very brief, the words are less important than the music, indeed they need hardly be present; and they rarely tell a story. I have found no case in which a primitive song tells a story with real elaboration or completeness. Nor need these songlets always have their origin in the choral—specifically in the improvisation and communal elaboration of a festal dance. Why, then, apply the term *ballad* to the brief and simple lyrical utterances, often nothing more than the repetition of a few syllables, or of one syllable,

Kiwai Papuans, Folk-Lore, vol. xxiv (1913), p. 308; Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, pp. 275, 388, 396-399; James Cowan, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, pp. 218, 219; E. H. Gomes, *Seventeen Years Among the Sea Dyaks of Borneo*, pp. 225, 226, 228, as "The song of mourning is among some tribes sung by a professional wailer, generally a woman."

which—according to the evidence—makes up the great body of primitive song?

But it is time to bring up a few illustrations.

First place may well be given to the words of Miss Alice Fletcher, who has had thirty-five years of acquaintance with Indian music:

The word 'song' to our ears, suggests words arranged in metrical form and adapted to be 'set to music,' as we say. The native word which is translated 'song' does not suggest any use of words. To the Indian, the music is of primal importance, words may or may not accompany the music. When words are used in a song, they are rarely employed as in a narrative, the sentences are not apt to be complete. In songs belonging to a religious ceremony the words are few and partake of a mnemonic character. They may refer to some symbol, may suggest the conception or the teaching the symbol stands for, rarely more than that. Vocables are frequently added to the word or words to eke out the musical measure. It sometimes happens that a song has no words at all, only vocables are used to float the voice. Whether vocables alone are used or used in connection with words, they are never a random collection of syllables. An examination of hundreds of songs shows that the vocables used fall into classes; one class is used for songs denoting action, another class for songs of a contemplative character, and it is also noted that when once vocables are adapted to a song they are never changed but are treated as if they were actual words.⁴³

She writes elsewhere to the same effect:

In Indian song and story we come upon a time when poetry is not yet differentiated from story and story not yet set free from song. We note that the song clasps the story as part of its being, and the story itself is not fully told without the cadence of the song. . . . The difference between spontaneous Indian melodies and the compositions of modern masters would seem to be not one of kind but of degree. . . . Many Indian songs have no words at all, vocables only being used to float the voice.⁴⁴

The investigator of Ojibway song also finds the melody

⁴³ *The Study of Indian Music*, 1915, pp. 231-232.

⁴⁴ *Indian Story and Song*, pp. 121, 124, 125.

to be more important than the words, and has nothing to say of an inevitable relation between dancing and song:

His [the Ojibway] poetry is not only inseparable but indistinguishable from music. . . . Among all civilized peoples the art of expression through verse is one thing, and the art of expression through modulated tones is quite another, linked though they often are by the deliberate intent of the composer, and always associated in the popular mind; in the Ojibway conception the two arts are not merely linked inseparably, they are fused in one. . .⁴⁵

The Ojibway is more gifted in music than in poetry; he has wrought out a type of beautiful melody, much of it perfect in form; his verse, for the most part, has not emerged from the condition of raw material.⁴⁶

He does sing his new melody to meaningless syllables, tentatively correcting it here and there, but meantime experimenting with words that convey meaning; and the probability is that the precise sentiment of the words finally accepted is established by rhythmic considerations, those that fall readily into the scheme of accents appealing to him as the most suitable vehicle for the melody.⁴⁷

The melody and the idea are the essential parts of a Midé song. Sometimes only one or two words occur in a song. . . . Many of the words used in a Midé song are unknown in the conversational Chippewa of the present time.⁴⁸

A number of Chippewa songs, as transcribed, have no words. Some of these songs originally may have had words and in a limited number of love songs the words partake so much of the nature of a soliloquy that they cannot conveniently be translated and given with the music. The words of most of the Chippewa songs are few in number and suggest rather than express the idea of the song. Only in the love songs and in few of the Midé songs are the words continuous.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Burton, *American Primitive Music*, p. 106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴⁸ Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Music*, I, 1910, pp. 14, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 1913, p. 2. Similarly Washington Matthews, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 1894, p. 185, writes of traditional songs among the Navahos, "One song consists almost exclusively of meaningless or archaic vocables. Yet not one syllable may be forgotten or misplaced."

Such evidence may be multiplied indefinitely.⁵⁰ The brevity of Indian songs is striking. Many have few words, some one word, and some no words. The songs of other savage peoples show the same characteristic. There are one-word traditional poems among the African Kwai, and two-word traditional poems of the Botocudos and the Eskimos. These are not narrative songs, and they need not be dance songs; for savage peoples do not always dance their verses. They are not, then, "ballads." Nor need they have any relation to choral improvisation.

Literary historians have dwelt too much, it seems to me, on the festal throng and communal improvisation and the folk-dance, when dealing with the "beginnings of poetry," until the whole subject has been thrown out of focus. The term ballad might well be left out of account altogether and reserved for the lyric species, appearing late in literary history, the "epic in little," or "short narrative told lyrically" exemplified in the conventional ballad collections. If we are to mean by ballads narrative songs like those of the middle ages, or narrative songs wherever they appear, we should certainly cease placing the ballad at the source of primitive poetry. It is not proved that the ballad, in any sense, came first, or even that choral songs preceded solos. It is likely enough that choral song and solos co-existed from the beginning, or even that solos preceded, for all that can be certainly known. The assumption that group power to sing, to compose songs, and to dance, precedes individual power to do these things,⁵¹ is fatuously

⁵⁰ It is obvious to the student of negro songs that these songs tend to retrograde to the simple repetition of phrases rather than to assume a narrative type.

⁵¹ Erich Schmidt ("Anfänge der Literatur," p. 9, in *Kultur der Gegenwart*, Leipzig, 1906, I) writes: . . . schon weil keine Masse nur den einfachsten Satz unisona improvisieren kann und alle romantischen Schwärmereien von der urheberlos singenden "Volksseele"

speculative. It rests neither on "overwhelming evidence" nor on probability. The individual ought to be able to engage in rhythmic motion, to compose tunes, and then to evolve words for these tunes, at least as early as he is able to do these things along with others of his kind. And let it be said again that it is safer to affirm that the primitive lyric, whether individual or choral, is not the ballad but the song—more strictly, the songlet.

V

IMPROVISATION AND FOLK-SONG

From the preceding discussion, it seems clear that it is time to instil caution into our association of the primitive festal throng improvising and collaborating, and hypothetical throngs of peasants or villagers collaborating in the creation of the English and Scottish popular ballads. Primitive song and the mediæval ballads are separate phenomena, with a tremendous gulf in time and civilization between. No doubt some of the choral improvisations of savage peoples found or find permanence, as is the case with individual improvisations, and also with songs thought out in solitude—or "dreamed" in the Indian way. But such songs—consisting of a few words, or a few lines monotonously repeated—are quite a different

eitel Dunst sind, muss sich Sondervortrag und Massenausbruch sehr früh gliedern. Einer schreit zuerst, einer singt und springt zuerst, die Menge macht es ihm nach, entweder treulich oder indem sie bei unartikulierten Refrains, bei einzelnen Worten, bei wiederkehrenden Sätzen beharrt.

In this connection, since it deserves to be cited somewhere, may be quoted a passage from von Humboldt: "The Indians pretend that when the araguatos [howling monkeys] fill the forests with their howling, there is always one that chaunts as leader of the chorus."—A. von Humboldt, *Travels in the Equinoctial Regions of America*, Bohn edition, vol. II, p. 70.

thing from improvisations of length, having a definite narrative element, and high artistic value as poetry. Most primitive improvisations are no tax on the memory, and hardly, in view of their brevity, on the creative power.⁵² A singer with a good voice and a turn for melody might succeed, whether he could compose words very well or not.

But when it is affirmed that improvising folk-throngs created the literary type appearing in the English and Scottish ballads of the Child collection, pieces like "The Hunting of the Cheviot," the Robin Hood pieces, "Sir Patrick Spens," "Lord Randal," etc., the affirmation is pure—and not too plausible—conjecture. We have to do with long, finished narratives, obeying regular stanzaic structure, provided with rhyme, and telling a whole story—pretty completely in older versions, more reducedly in the later. To assume that ignorant uneducated people composed these, having the power to do so just because they were ignorant and uneducated—that is quite a different thing, and it finds no support in the probabilities.

Of late years a considerable number of pieces composed by groups of unlearned people whose community life socialized their thinking have been made available to students of folk song, namely American cowboy and lumberman songs, and negro spirituals. It is hardly likely that human ability has fallen greatly since the middle ages; yet

⁵² In the field of primitive ritual song there are many feats of memory that are quite wonderful. Long years are required for an Indian to become a really adept renderer of tribal rituals. See, for examples of verbal length, in the 27th Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, the ritual song of 39 lines on p. 42, or that of 50 lines on pp. 571-572, at the bottom very nobly poetic. Similar examples are to be found in other tribes. Also there is something remotely analogous to ballad structure in such ritual songs as are given on pp. 206-242 of *The Hako*. But these ritual songs are not improvisations; nor are they of "communal" rendering.

when we see what is the best that communal composition can achieve now, and are asked to believe what it created some centuries ago, the discrepancy becomes unbelievable.⁵³ The American pieces which, according to their collectors, have been communally composed, or at least emerged from the ignorant and unlettered in isolated regions, afford ample testimony in style, structure, quality, and technique to the fact that the English and Scottish popular ballads could not have been so composed, nor their type so established. In general, real communalistic or peoples' poetry, as we can place the finger on it, composed in the collaborating manner emphasized by Professor Gummere and Professor Kittredge, is crude, structureless, incoherent, and lacking in striking and memorable qualities. There are now many collections of American folk-song, made in many States. In these collections, the pieces of memorable quality are exactly those for which folk-composition can not be claimed. The few rough improvisations which we can identify as emerging from the folk themselves—which we actually know to be the work of unlettered individuals or throngs—are those farthest from the Child ballads in their general characteristics and in their worth as poetry. Nor is there a single instance of such an improvisation developing into a good piece, or becoming, as time goes on, anything like a Child ballad. Yet they emerged from throngs no less homogeneous, perhaps more homogeneous than the mediæval peasants and villagers.

The most homogeneous groups in the world are doubtless the military groups; yet war and march songs are al-

⁵³ See my *New-World Analogues of the English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, the *Mid-West Quarterly*, April, 1916. Also *The South western Cowboy Songs and the English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, *Modern Philology*, October, 1913.

ways appropriated, never composed by the soldiers. The examples afforded by the war for the Union are still familiar; the favorite song developed by the Cuban war⁵⁴ was adapted from a French-Creole song; and we know the origin of the songs popular among the soldiers in the present European war. If the "homogeneity" theory has any value, it ought to find illustrations in army life. And do prisoners in stripes and lock step ever invent songs? Granting the "communal conditions" theory, our penitentiaries should be veritable fountains of song and balladry. As a matter of fact, the most famous of prison ballads is the masterpiece of an accomplished poet,—Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol."

Another thing shown by modern collections of folk-song is that the songs preserved among the folk are nearly certain *not* to be those composed by them. Those they make themselves are just about the first to die. Usually some special impetus, some cause for persistence or popularity, is to be detected for the pieces that live. And the striking or memorable qualities, or the special mode of diffusion, necessary to bring vitality are just what the genuine "communal" folk-pieces do not and cannot have.

The test of subject-matter should also be taken into account, when we are considering the likelihood that some process akin to the processes of primitive choral song and dance—continued through untold centuries among villagers and peasants—produced the Child ballads. Perhaps I may be permitted to quote my own words here:

. . . The real communal pieces, as we can identify them, deal with the life and the interests of the people who compose them. They do not occupy themselves with the stories and the lives of the class above them. The cowboy pieces deal with cattle trails, barrooms, broncho riding, not with the lives of ranch-owners and employers;

⁵⁴ Joseph T. Miles, "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight."

and the negro piece deals with the boll weevil, not with the adventures of the owners of the plantations. Songs well-attested as emerging from the laboring folk throngs of the Old-World deal with the interests of factory life or agricultural life, or with the adventures of those of the social class singing or composing the songs. What then must we think of the English and Scottish ballads, if the people composed them? Their themes are not at all of the character to be expected. They are not invariably on the work, or on episodes in the life of the ignorant and lowly. Would they have had so great vitality or have won such currency if they had dealt with labourers, ploughmen, spinners, peasants, common soldiers, rather than with aristocrats? The typical figures in the ballads are kings and princesses, knights and ladies,—King Estmere, Young Beichan, Young Hunting, Lord Randal, Earl Brand, Edward, Sir Patrick Spens, Edom o'Gordon, Lord Thomas and Fair Annet, Lady Maisry, Proud Lady Margaret, or leaders like the Percy and the Douglas. We learn next to nothing concerning the humbler classes from them; less than from Froissart's Chronicles, far less than from Chaucer. The life is not that of the hut or the village, but that of the bower and the hall. Nor is the language parallel to that of the cowboy and negro pieces. It has touches of professionalism, stock poetic formulae, alliteration, traces of the septenar meter. It is not rough, flat, crude, in the earlier and undegenerated versions; instead there is much that is poetic, telling, beautiful. It is for its time much nearer the poetry coming from professional hands than what might be expected from mediæval counterparts of *The Old Chisholm Trail* and *The Boll Weevil*. No doubt there existed analogues of these pieces, i. e., songs which were sung by and were the creation of ignorant and unlettered villagers; but we may be certain that these mediæval analogues were not the Child ballads.⁵⁵

On the whole, the type of the mediæval ballad, with choral refrain, is more likely to have emerged from mediæval music—to have been determined by the kind of melodies which prevailed, the lyrical treatment given them, or the type of dance they accompanied—than to be the amazingly persistent legacy of the dance-songs of primitive man. It is far less likely that primitive man established the lyrical species we now call ballad⁵⁶ than that this species

⁵⁵ *The Mid-West Quarterly*, April, 1916, pp. 179-180.

⁵⁶ Of "incremental repetition," often emphasized as inherited from primitive poetry, and held to be the surest proof of the communal

derived from the aristocratic song, or dance, or minstrel modes, of the mediæval bower and the hall. The English and Scottish ballads should no longer be inevitably related to primitive singing and dancing throngs, improvising and collaborating. We can not look upon creations of such length, structure, coherence, finish, artistic value, adequacy of expression, as emerging from the communal improvisation of simple uneducated folk-throngs. This view might serve so long as we had no clear evidence before us as to the kind of thing that the improvising folk-muse is able to create. When we see what is the best the latter can do, under no less favorable conditions, at the present time, we remain skeptical as to the power of the mediæval rustics and villagers. The mere fact that the mediæval throngs are supposed to have danced while they sung, whereas modern cowboys, lumbermen, ranchmen, or negroes do not, should not have endowed the mediæval muse with such striking superiority of product.

The subjects, the authorship and composition of primitive song, and the authorship and composition of the English and Scottish popular ballads, are distinct; and, for both, the unqualified affirmation of "communal" origin should no longer be made.

LOUISE POUND.

origin of the ballad type, Mr. John Robert Moore (*The Influence of Transmission on the English Ballads*, *Modern Language Review*, XI, 1916, p. 398) writes: "Unfortunately . . . the facts seem to make little provision for the theory; for it is the simple ballads which most often have the fixed refrain, and the broadsides which exhibit the most marked use of incremental repetition. Furthermore, when oral tradition adds a refrain to an original printed broadside, it is only a simple refrain, without the structural device of accretion which Professor Gummere considers so characteristic." . . .